



"Doom" in St Thomas's Church, Salisbury

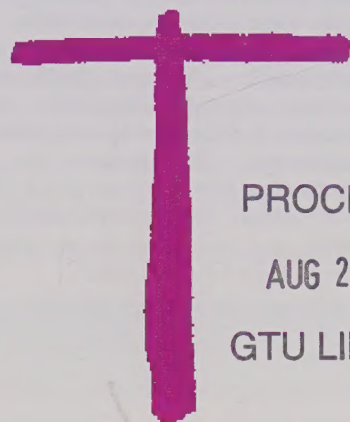
## The four last things: death

Tom Lusty

At a Lent lunch a few years ago I was given the remit "Jesus, anguished and forsaken". When the publicity came out, however, the flyer read "Revd Tom Lusty, Chaplain at Wheatfields Hospice: Anguished and forsaken". The thing about death is that it can be seen as so much anguish and forsakenness and something that one would rather avoid if at all possible, rather like a few of the other last things.

Given that I've spent the last five years inhabiting a hospice on a more or less daily basis I now know that death isn't all that bad. It can sometimes be protracted and exhausting for all concerned. Even in such circumstances, however, a good death is possible. With a good death there is a tangible sense of completeness, of dying with integrity. To be honest I did not spend a great deal of time talking about heaven and hell or indeed judgment, beyond speaking with the nurses for some of whom heaven was their favourite euphemism for death: "Gladys has gone to heaven now - God help them all up there". I did speak about death, however, and the opportunities that came my way to speak about my Christian faith (when invited to do so) were considerable.

I remember reading what Norman Autton, the founding father of healthcare chaplaincy, had written on the matter of preparing for a good death. The advice has dated now. Hospice chaplains are currently a very small group of healthcare professionals with a unique specialism. Within our tiny world we have developed a repertoire of material that hopefully enables people to prepare spiritually for their own dying.



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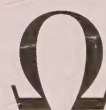
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## Endings

This issue is given to a consideration of the "last things" - the "elephant in the room" in the lives of so many Christian communities, whether parochial, or monastic, or, indeed, Franciscan. How are we to believe, think, proclaim our faith when it comes to death, judgment, hell and heaven? Read on!

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The three resources that have been most helpful in preparing me for this task of hospice chaplain are *Mud and Stars*, which gave me the theology, Tom Gordon's *A Need for Living* which gave me the metaphors, and John O'Donohue's *Benedictus* which gave me everything else - when there is nothing else you can do, you can always bless. That is a powerful thing to be left with. If you can bless sublimely, even better.

Dying is not about so much anguish and forsakenness. A good death is a movement towards integration, from "dislocation to relocation, disorientation to re-orientation, disintegration to re-integration" as *Mud and Stars* puts it - part of a wider crucifixion/resurrection dynamic, and one where we are always on the look out for resurrection.



The above photo is from the cover of another book by Tom Gordon entitled *New Journeys Now Begin*. It depicts the access path to north beach on the Island of Iona, and the inscription reads "No bikes beyond this point". For each of us there will come a point where we have to relinquish the bicycle to go on the next stage of the journey. Getting off the bike can be painful because we get used to cycling everywhere. The more in life we can put the bicycle down and enjoy the view, the better prepared we will be for

## HEALER

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**E**is for Exploring Feelings

**A**is for Adjustment to Loss

**L**is for Looking back

**E**is for Existential issues

**R**is for Religious issues.



that moment in life when we will each have to say goodbye to the bike.

*A good death is a movement towards integration, from "dislocation to relocation, disorientation to re-orientation, disintegration to re-integration".*

As a group of Sue Ryder hospice chaplains we adopted a mnemonic devised by one of our number, Linda Elliott, as a helpful way into conversations about dying. The HEALER model goes like this: H is for Hope (and / or Peace) - what lifts people's spirits and enables people to be at peace? E is for Exploring Feelings - encouraging people to articulate their feelings. A is for Adjustment to Loss - exploring how people cope, how significant loss is transcended. L is for Looking back - doing a Life review - also asking if there is anything left unresolved?

E and the R stand for Existential and Religious issues. Some people can be terrified about death for reasons that go beyond the physical process of dying - we put that under "Existential". Religion comes last of all. I think that is healthy: it says that not all our needs are religious ones. We may choose to express our grounds for hope (indeed all of the above) in religious terms, but for no one is this exclusively so. We sometimes leave off the E and the R where these do not apply and are left with the more Franciscan "HEAL" model.

Elliott's mnemonic provides us with a helpful way in to a conversation about dying: six different prompts for starting a dialogue. The prompts are not to be tackled exhaustively in chronological order - more as a way of focussing on some of the ways in which the conversation might go.

I would contend that this mnemonic is a helpful exercise for us all in the season of Advent when we reflect on our own mortality. In doing so we will be more open to engage with others who may be starting out on the process of the end of life's journey. When someone asks "What hymns are you having for your funeral?" the response "Goodness, I have never thought of that" may not be adequate. An open response will always be better when it comes to talking about dying, at that point when you are given the cue to 'go for it'.

In any model of spiritual preparation for dying you can't really leave out the letting go ...and the leaping. John O'Donohue describes the daily handing over of one's

life as the act of awakening and surrender. The possibility of this daily practising of such a hand over, however we may choose to do it, of our lives into the life of God may well be what makes us most Christlike.

Each morning we awaken to the light...

each night we surrender to the dark...

Awakening and surrender: they frame each day and each life;

between them the journey where anything can happen.

(John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara*)

## References

*Mud and Stars: The Report of a Working Party on the impact of Hospice Experience on the Church's Ministry of Healing* (Sobell Publications, 1991)

*A Need for Living: Signposts on the Journey of Life and Beyond*, Tom Gordon (Wild Goose Publications, 2001)

*Benedictus: A Book of Blessings*, John O'Donohue (Transworld Publications, 2007)

The HEAL(ER) mnemonic was devised by Revd Linda Elliott, formerly chaplain at Thorpe Hall Hospice in Peterborough. *f*



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# Judgment

## Richard Bauckham

Christians were once very familiar with the image of the Last Judgment. In many a medieval parish church there was a very prominent wall painting of 'doomsday'. (A few survive.) Christ was depicted as judge, seated above the chancel arch, despatching the resurrected dead to their eternal destiny. To his right the angels led away the righteous to paradise, while to his left the devils eagerly grabbed the wicked and dragged them into the fires of hell. To gaze at such an image Sunday by Sunday must have made a profound impression on illiterate peasants who understood the Latin words of the service hardly at all. To many of us today it looks like an image designed to instil fear. We may wonder what it has to do with the Gospel message of the love of God or with the Jesus of the Gospels who lived and died to enact that love of God for the salvation of sinners.

Yet it is the Jesus of the Gospels who says that he will sit in judgment on all people, distinguishing the innocent from the guilty as a shepherd might separate the sheep from the goats in a mixed herd (Matthew 25:31-46). In the teaching of Jesus and throughout the New Testament there is frequent talk of two eternal destinies. Yet they do not have quite the symmetry that the medieval doomsday paintings might suggest. In the parable of

*Since Jesus in his incarnate life is the truth of God made manifest in human history; the judgment of the last day is in a sense already taking place in people's response to him.*

the sheep and the goats, Jesus consigns those on his left hand to 'the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels' (v 41), whereas those on his right inherit the kingdom prepared for themselves (v 34). One destiny is the truly human destiny for which God has created all people; the other is the consequence of refusing that destiny and making an irrevocable choice for evil. Moreover, while most of what the New Testament says about the ultimate fate of the damned is designed to warn people against it, such warnings are given only in the context of the positive prospect of participation in God's future for his whole creation. The images of loss highlight the seriousness of the choice for good that the Christian Gospel invites and makes possible.

The distinctive way in which the Gospel of John relates Jesus Christ to divine judgment may help us to understand this. Since Jesus in his incarnate life is the truth of God made manifest in human history, the judgment of the last day is in

a sense already taking place in people's response to him. Those who refuse to come to the light he would shed on their lives, choosing to pursue evil in darkness, are already condemned. Jesus himself, this Gospel claims, condemns no one. He came not to condemn but to save. He embodies God's purpose for salvation for the whole world. Yet Jesus' message, his witness to God's truth, the same witness that leads those who believe in him into the truth, itself condemns those who reject it. At the final judgment, Jesus' message, whose purpose was salvation, will become a witness against - and so the judge - of those who built their lives on rejecting it (John 3:17-21; 12:46-48).

I shall try to answer two key questions about the way the last judgment is depicted in the New Testament and the Christian tradition. One concerns the dualism of the portrayal. Why are there only two fates to which those who are judged are consigned? Since their whole lives are being assessed, should there not be a sliding scale of good and evil with rewards and punishments in corresponding gradations? The answer is that, although it is by their deeds that people will be judged, God's final judgment is not a legalistic implementation of distributive and retributive justice. What is judged is the appropriateness of a life for entry into God's eternity. What each person's deeds expose is the fundamental alignment of that person's self towards God and the good, or, conversely, their fundamental rejection of God and the good.

Therefore judgment according to deeds is not inconsistent with the Pauline message that it is faith that is decisive for salvation. Deeds are the index of faith or the lack of it. Nor does judgment according to deeds exclude God's mercy. Far from it. No one could pass God's final assessment of their life without God's limitless mercy. It is true that even with God's limitless mercy no one whose fundamental choice has been made for evil can enter the eternal kingdom of

God's righteousness. In the nature of the case they do not belong there. But those who, sinners that they are, have desired God's mercy, are shown, in the final truth of things that the last judgment brings to light, to be aligned towards God and his kingdom. They belong there. They receive mercy, richly, generously, without calculation of faults and merits.

The second question is closely related: by what criterion are people judged? Though the various New Testament witnesses portray this in a variety of ways, they are united in seeing relationship to Christ as in some way the criterion. I

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suggest two ways in which we might think about this. One is in terms of Jesus' own message about the coming of the kingdom of God, which was a message both of radical grace and of radical demand. Jesus came to call sinners, not the righteous, but he called them to a life of radical commitment to living the life of God's kingdom. In the Gospels Jesus' loving acceptance of sinners is matched by the comprehensive practice of love that he demands of his disciples. That the verdict at the last judgment should be both according to deeds and entirely dependent on God's mercy is consistent with this.

Another way of thinking of Christ as the criterion of judgment is in terms of the cross. The crucified Christ has borne already and representatively the full

*Continued on page 5*



**Richard Bauckham is a biblical scholar and theologian, now based in Cambridge. His latest books are the Bible and Ecology (2010) and Jesus: A Very Short Introduction (2011, OUP). More information is available on his website: <http://richardbauckham.co.uk>**



# Hell

Joseph Emmanuel N/SSF



**Hell = Love.** Reading such a statement one might be forgiven for making two immediate deductions: that I have been reading the works of Philip Larkin or that I belong to a grim Calvinistic sect which takes an unholy delight in consigning those with whom I disagree to eternal torment. Both deductions would be wrong.

However, I would suggest that the above statement is, in fact, the best way to understand what we refer to as Hell and that any attempt to deny its existence or to mitigate its reality is, however well meant, wrong. Indeed, I believe that the existence of Hell is one of the many

*I believe that the existence of Hell is one of the many powerful signs of God's all-present all-giving love.*

powerful signs of God's all-present all-giving love. In order to pursue this rather surprising statement further I want to look briefly at two questions. The first is what is Hell; what does the term actually mean (as opposed to what do people *think* it means)? The second, which raises questions of theodicy (God's justice), is to ask who might be there?

Although conceptualizing the physical nature of Hell has been something which has inspired many of our finest artists, composers and writers to great effect one would have to say that references in the Bible are, in fact, few and far between. To make matters more difficult, various

Hebrew and Greek words have been carelessly rendered as 'Hell' in English translations of the Bible although the meanings of the different words are quite different. Despite this uncertainty (or perhaps because of it) people have tended to extrapolate a great deal from comparatively little. Our Lord refers to a place of fire and punishment (see, for example Matthew 13.42), a theme which is continued in the book of Revelation (21.8) but I would contend that, in the past, there has been an over-literal interpretation of and disproportionate emphasis on these particular passages. In the original language texts the majority of references to what is referred to as 'Hell' in English are made using one of two words: *Gehenna* (Matthew 5.29 etc) and *Sheol* (Ps 9 etc). In the case of the Greek word *Gehenna* it is a combination of two Hebrew words *gay* (or valley) and *Hinnom* (a proper noun) meaning literally the 'valley of Hinnom.'

Although we cannot be absolutely certain to what (or to whom) Hinnom refers, it seems likely that this refers to a geographical region to the South or South West of Jerusalem now known as the Wady al-Rabâby. In various references to 'the valley of Hinnom' in the Hebrew Scriptures it is made clear that it was seen as a place of impurity and human sacrifice (2 Kings 16) and above all an extremely unpleasant place of exile and hidden-ness. But where did the idea of perpetual fire come from?

If *Gehenna*/*Sheol* is not, in fact, a sulphurous lake, why did Jesus speak about *Gehenna* as a place of fire? In order to answer that question we need look no further than the writings of the medieval rabbi and exegete David Kimhi (1160-1235) known in Hebrew as the RaDak who described the physical area of *Gehenna* in the following terms:

"*Gehenna* is a repugnant place, into which filth and cadavers are thrown, and in which fires perpetually burn... on which account, by analogy, the judgment of the wicked is called '*Gehenna*'...". (The Longer Commentary of R.David

Kimhi on the First Book of the Psalms, trans. R.G. Finch, London, 1919) Although Kimhi was writing many hundreds of years after Jesus there is no reason to suggest that the valley's use had changed radically; it was, in essence, the municipal rubbish dump and incinerator for Jerusalem. We might see *Gehenna*, then, as a geographically unpleasant place of exile far away from civilisation rather than a sulphurous lake of eternal torment.

In the case of *Sheol* one obvious reference may be found in Psalm 9.17 "The wicked shall depart to *Sheol*, all the nations that forget God" (RSV). Yet here, too, there is no information about what will actually happen to the souls who are consigned to *Sheol*; it seems from the context that they depart into a place of eternal exile (which should not surprise us for a place of supernatural wandering was common in the mythology of the time).

*Even if Hell is 'merely' a place of ultimate and eternal spiritual exclusion how can we reconcile this place of exclusion with the actions of an all-loving God?*

Yet again the notion of exile comes across strongly. It would therefore seem sensible to suggest that the original texts point us towards an understanding of Hell as a place of exile rather than the blistering furnace so powerfully evoked by writers like John Milton in *Paradise Lost* or medieval artists painting dooms in their parish church. A brief glance at the writings of theologians through the ages would also tend to support this view for although traditional scholastic theology admits that there is an element of *poena sensus* (physical torment) for those souls in Hell, the emphasis is clearly on *poena damni* - a pain of exclusion or loss (see volume 27 of the *Summa Theologiae* by St Thomas Aquinas). Moving to modern mainstream theological writing it would seem that this view of Hell as a place of ultimate exclusion rather than a place of punishment is also supported.

But, even if Hell is 'merely' a place of ultimate and eternal spiritual exclusion how can we reconcile this place of exclusion with the actions of an all-loving God? What sort of perverse Creator would create human beings in His own image in order to consign them to exclusion? From the evidence of the Scriptures and above all by the testimony of Christ, we can state confidently that God would not and does not want to reject us; but what if we choose to reject Him as



Illustration from the Hortus Deliciarum of Herrad of Landsberg c.1180

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is our right under free will? A love which has no choice or which is forced is no love at all, as the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England noted in its document *The Mystery of Salvation* (Church House, 1995):

*No-one can be compulsorily installed in heaven, whose characteristic is the communion of love. God whose being is love preserves our human freedom, for freedom is the condition of love. Although God's love goes...to the uttermost...the possibility remains for each human being of a final rejection of God....* (p.198)

This points us towards what I believe to be the truth of Hell: it is a place of exclusion made by God for those who ultimately choose to reject Him; yes, Hell is a place of eternal exclusion but it is a place of self-exclusion.

*God whose being is love preserves our human freedom, for freedom is the condition of love.*

Is it conceivable that, at the last, anyone would wish to reject the ultimate beauty of God and eternal peace of Paradise? Is it possible that Hell exists (because the notion of an entirely loving God demands it) but that it is, in fact, empty because of the unlikelihood of people rejecting the God who seeks to enter into communion with them in Christ before, during and after their death and whose salvation awaits even those who come at the last moment (Matthew 20.1)? I cannot and will not answer that question for it is not, ultimately, for me to answer. *f*

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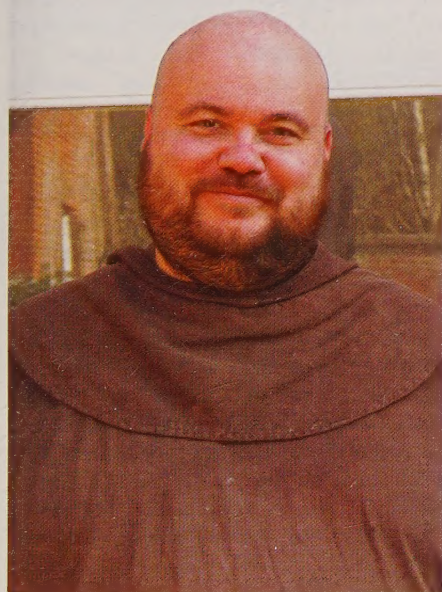
weight of God's final condemnation of sinners, and has borne it in order that God's love may reach those under condemnation, bringing them forgiveness and renewal of life. Those who by faith find in Christ their representative discover already, provisionally, God's verdict in their favour. The astonishing coincidence of God's utter condemnation of sinners and God's radical grace for sinners has occurred definitively at the cross and will recur at the last judgment. The last judgment will implement only what has been decided once and for all at the cross. From this perspective we can see how mistaken it is to think that God's judgment

*In the light of God's judgment all illusions about oneself, all pretences and deceit, all distorted self-representations must be discarded. It follows that also all our illusions about other people must be dispelled.*

and God's mercy detract from each other, as though the more weight we give to judgment, the less we can give to mercy, and vice versa. Rather, there is direct proportionality between the two. God's mercy is as extensive as the severity of his judgment, and his judgment as uncompromising as the depth of his mercy.

The image of the last judgment points to the need for the final truth of all human lives to be made clear: 'nothing is hidden that will not be disclosed' (Luke 8:17). In the light of God's judgment all illusions about oneself, all pretences and deceit, all distorted self-representations must be discarded. It follows that also all our illusions about other people must be dispelled. Such truth will be painful but will also include happy surprises. At the same time, at the last judgment, we shall confront the truth of the One who judges, the truth of his dealings with us in this life as well as the truth of his final verdict on us. We shall recognize him as he is in Jesus Christ - in his uncompromising righteousness and his infinite mercy.

Medieval Christians contemplated doomsday on a regular basis. Most Christians now do not. But perhaps there is something to be said for contemplating the last judgment - among the other great images of the Christian hope. It could train us to be honest about ourselves before God, to seek some understanding of the truth of our lives as God sees them, knowing that his love for us can never cloud his judgment but includes it. *f*



*Before joining SSF, Joseph Emmanuel was in parochial ministry in Tottenham and Croydon. He is currently based in Glasshampton Monastery.*



# A destiny beyond death: heaven

John Polkinghorne

**Ω** Every story that science can tell ends ultimately in decay and futility. This is due to the fact that without external intervention, systems become increasingly disorderly (the second law of thermodynamics). Even the universe itself is going to die after billions of years, as it eventually becomes too cold and too dilute to support life anywhere within it. The atheist physicist, Steven Weinberg, once said that the more he understood the universe, the more it seemed to him ultimately pointless. However, Christianity has an additional story to tell of the everlasting faithfulness of the universe's Creator.

As Jesus told the Sadducees (Mark 12.18-27), God is not God of the dead but of the living. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were not abandoned at their deaths, like broken pots cast onto a rubbish heap; the patriarchs have a destiny beyond their deaths. But can we actually make sense of such an idea as a human life beyond the decay of the body?

Once one begins to think about this, it becomes clear that conditions of both continuity and discontinuity between this life and the next would have to be satisfied for his hope to make sense. On the one hand, it really must be Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who live again in the kingdom of God and not just new characters given the old names for old times' sake. This is the condition of continuity. On the other hand, there would be no sense in making the patriarchs to live again simply in order for them to die again. This is the condition of discontinuity between this world and the next. We must consider these two conditions in turn.

In much traditional Christian thinking, the carrier of continuity has been supposed to be the human soul, thought of as being a

separable spiritual component, temporarily housed in the fleshly body during this life but released at death. This is a view that the church borrowed from Plato, but today it has become a problematic idea. Considerations such as the effect of brain damage on the personality encourage the idea of human beings as a kind of package deal of the mental and material in an inseparable unity. This is an idea that would not have surprised most of the writers of the Bible, for the Hebrews thought of human beings in precisely this integrated way. We are not apprentice angels, and our destiny beyond death will be resurrection, not simply spiritual survival. But what then is the soul? It is surely 'the real me' and at first sight it is about as difficult to understand what this is in this life, as it might be beyond it. What makes me, a bald elderly academic, the same person as the schoolboy with the shock of black hair in the photograph of long ago? It is not, as one might have thought, material continuity, since the atoms in our bodies are changing all the time, through wear and tear, eating and drinking. I am atomically distinct from that schoolboy. What connects us is the continuing development of something like the immensely complex 'information-bearing pattern' (memories, character, etc) carried at any one time by the matter of my body. That 'pattern' is the soul and, though it will dissolve with the decay of my body, it is a perfectly sensible hope that the faithful God will not allow it to be lost but will preserve it in the divine memory in order to restore its embodiment in the great divine act of resurrection.

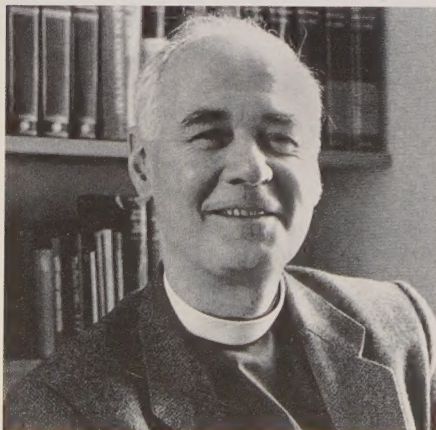
However, that re-embodiment will have to be in a new form of 'matter', not subject to the drift to decay of the matter of this world. The existence of this 'matter' is the

condition of discontinuity. It seems to make sense scientifically that God could choose to create such 'matter', endowed with strong organising principles that resist decay, through the transformation of old matter. In theological terms this would be the transition from the old creation, a world of immortality, into the new creation, the world of everlasting life. The example and guarantee of this is Christ's resurrection, the seed event from which the new creation has already begun to grow. The tomb was empty precisely because the Lord's dead body had been transformed into the 'matter' of his risen and glorious body.

Our destiny is resurrection, not spiritual survival, because it is an essential aspect of human existence that we are embodied in some form. I also think that it is intrinsic to human beings that we are temporal. Our destiny is everlasting life, not the timeless eternity that is God's alone. There will be 'time' in the world to come, but different from the time of this world and so not merely the prolongation of



**A sixteenth century brass of the resurrection of Christ, at St Nicolas' Church, Great Coates in the Diocese of Lincoln**



*Rev Dr. John Polkinghorne has published many papers and books on theoretical elementary particle physics as well as a series of books exploring and developing aspects of the compatibility of religion and science. His latest book is Questions of Truth (2009), co-authored with Nicholas Beale.*

present history. People sometimes fear that eventually heaven might become rather boring. If its life were a matter of sitting on a cloud, endlessly chanting "Alleluia!" that might well have been so, but heaven will be much more exciting than all that. This world is one that contains sacraments, covenanted occasions on which the veil between humanity and deity is thinned. The life of the world to come will be wholly sacramental, suffused with the unveiled presence of God.

If we learn anything about God from the long history of this universe, it is surely that God is not in a hurry, but is content to

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## Minister's Letter

*Sister Sue, Minister Provincial of the First Order Sisters in the European Province, writes:*

Dear Friends,

By the time this reaches you I will have been in office as Minister for just over six months, and I am already beginning to feel more at home in the role. I am very thankful for the support of my sisters and brothers, and for the prayers and encouragement of many people.

"Don't underestimate the significance of your being here, among us. It is hugely important - I don't think you quite realise what an effect you have just by living your life as Franciscans". Having heard a number of comments such as this in recent months, referring to the life of several different Franciscan houses, both in the UK and Korea, I have been reflecting on what might lie behind this often earnestly expressed affirmation.

When sisters or brothers hear such comments I believe we can be quite bewildered. We are just getting on with our life, doing what to us are ordinary things, and may be very aware of our frailties and failings, the gap between our aspirations and the reality of our lives. Hopefully we hear what is said, but I wonder how far we understand it, or for that matter really take it on board?

Pondering all this, I had been thinking that maybe people some-

how experience sisters and brothers, and our life together, as symbolic of the presence of God in some way. This might mean that their response to us is actually expressing an intuitive recognition and welcoming of God in their midst. Yet all Christians are members of the Body of Christ, and both Francis and Clare remind us that all are called to be God-bearers, bearing Christ spiritually, as Mary bore Him physically. So what is it particularly, I asked myself, that people respond to in us as Religious?

My thinking has been helped along by listening to teaching by Dr Martin Poulson SDB, of The Religious Life Institute at Heythrop College, on Sacraments of the encounter with God, and the significance of vowed religious life in that context. Religious vows point to the reality of God who calls us, and to whom we make what others see as a radical response in our commitment to a life under vows. Dr Poulson, himself a Roman Catholic Salesian brother, suggests that brothers and sisters publicly vowed to live for God, are by their being a sacramental sign of God's presence. As such we do what we are.

As Poulson says, we are not always at our best (!), but at our best, people encounter something of God through



our being there. Clearly this is due primarily not to any particular qualities we may have, but to God's generous and reliable self-giving. However it does mean that our being there as exemplars of the particular way of Christian discipleship to which we are called as sisters and brothers matters a very great deal. Maybe it also suggests something about the importance in many circumstances of our being clearly visible?

We do well to heed those who tell us not to underestimate the significance of all this, and to thank God - both that it is so, and that God gives us witnesses to open up our awareness of this reality.

Pax et Bonum,

*Sue CSF*

*Continued from page 6*

work, as love must work, through patient process. This will be true in the 'time' of the world to come. Part of the salvific process that awaits us will involve judgment and purgation. Properly understood, these are hopeful words. Judgment is not appearing before a testy celestial Judge Jeffries, eager to condemn, but being brought to see ourselves as we really are. This will be painful, but it is a necessary part of our entering fully into reality. We are all going to die with our lives incomplete and our sins only partly repented of, in short, with dross still in our lives. Purgation is the necessary removal of that dross to enable us to enter ever more fully into the life of God, our Redeemer. As we progressively encounter the divine reality, the life of heaven will be far from boring.

There is inevitably speculation in what I have been trying to say, but it rests on two trustworthy foundations, the faithfulness of God and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. *f*

## Theme Prayer



Keep us, O Lord, while we tarry on this earth,  
in a serious seeking after you,  
and in an affectionate walking with you,  
every day of our lives;  
that when you come,  
we may be found not hiding our talent, nor serving the flesh,  
nor yet asleep with our lamp unfurnished,  
but waiting and longing for our Lord,  
our glorious God for ever. Amen.

Richard Baxter (1691) *The Daily Office SSF* (2010), p 541.



# A story told in t

A visit to Assisi has some 'must see' places, among them: the majestic basilicas of St Francis and St Clare; St Mary of the Angels with the little chapel built by St Francis enclosed in it; the Carceri where Francis used to go to pray and San Damiano where Clare and her sisters lived. None of it today looks as it did in Francis' time; the basilicas and the buildings we now see at places like the Carceri, were built after his death. However, the city and its environs still speak of Francis and Clare and its citizens and its churches have erected sculptures, paintings and prayer places to encourage reflection on the saints and Jesus Christ to whom they constantly point.

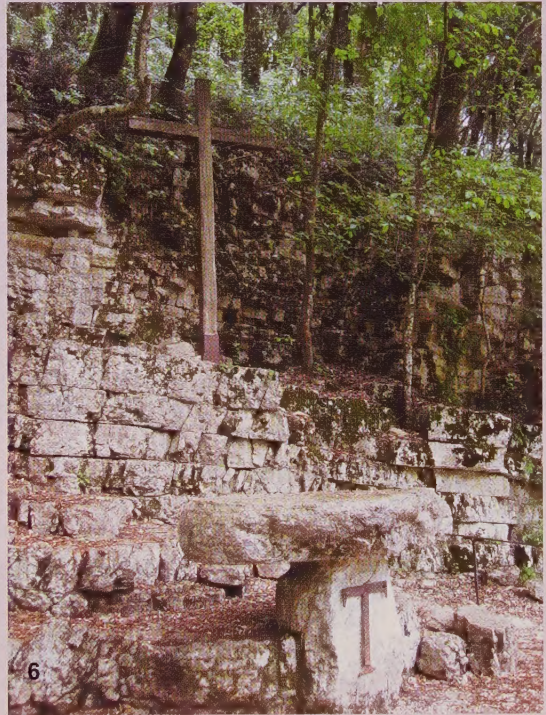
Nancy Adams TSSF visited Assisi in May, to hear Richard Rohr OFM and Cynthia Bourgeault speak on "Franciscan spirituality and cosmic love". While there, she took some photos of various items to be spotted in the less obvious places, which together tell much of the Francis story.

(1) Assisi, birth place of Francis (1181) and Clare (1194), is built on a hill, overlooking a floodplain, which is now fertile farmland. (2) The stone houses nestle cheek by jowl. (3) Off to school?- a scene beside the door of Francis' paternal home. (4) Francis was expected to follow his father's trade as a cloth merchant, but he could not refuse when asked by the poor, 'For God's sake', to give them some cloth. (5) He tried to fulfill another aspiration, that of becoming a knight, but defeat saw him languishing for a year in a Perugian prison. Finally, his ransom paid, he sought God's will, praying in the many churches in and around Assisi, including San Stefano's; or (6) outdoors where he would use a cave or cleft in the rock for his chapel. (7) After a time, he became a penitent, and was joined by others. In 1209 Pope Innocent III recognised them as an order, the Lesser Brothers. (8) Clare and Francis followed Jesus Christ in poverty and with great joy, supporting one another in their commitment to him. [Nancy stands beside a sculpture made of pieces of broken pottery, in the Chiesa Nuova.] (9) Francis had a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary as the bearer of the Son of God, who became poor for our sake, (10) and his love of Christ gave him a special rapport with animals and birds, as this door panel reminds us.





# ways of Assisi





# Community Routes

## ◆◆ A Bacon Scholar

*Austin writes:-*

Although I have just finished and been awarded an MA in Theology, the subject matter was Franciscan Studies. My interest in it began in 1990 when I studied for the Franciscan Diploma at the Franciscan International Study Centre in Canterbury. My enthusiasm grew from then on and when I came to Canterbury in 2003, and found a couple of years later that the MA was being offered at FISC, I soon asked for permission to enrol.

In the first year there were only four students, two of us Anglicans. As it was a taught course we chose various options, mine were:- Clare, Writings of Francis, Franciscan Sources, Franciscan Reform and Division and the Franciscan Intellectual tradition, each with a long essay. We were also allowed to 'audit' other modules and one on Franciscan Christology I found interesting but I'm glad I didn't have to do an essay on it!

My work on the MA slowed dramatically after I was appointed Master of Eastbridge, such that Christopher John started his MA a year after me and finished a year before me. But I got there in the end after applying for an extension, with evidence from my employer at Eastbridge (the Archbishop!) that my work was delaying my studies.

The largest part of the MA was a long dissertation and I chose to research and write on Roger Bacon, a thirteenth

century scientist and friar. Coming from a scientific background in my pre-SSF days was one reason I was interested in him but mainly I chose Bacon as a subject because my tutor considered him to be 'more of a crank than a genius'. This view I felt was completely wrong and by reading and researching widely, I believe I refuted his view. When I looked through the vast amount Bacon wrote there are gems of quite original research and there are conclusions of his that were centuries ahead of his time.

I felt that Bacon's main aim in his long life as scientist and friar was being missed by later philosophers and theologians on the one hand and scientists on the other. For certainly Bacon wasn't a first rate philosopher, theologian or scientist; but he was not trying to be any of those. I believe he was an early worker in the science and religion debate such that he was trying to put scientific study and conclusions of science in the service of religion and the Church. I concluded that he could be seen as an heir of St Augustine of Hippo who believed that science and philosophy could become the servants and handmaidens of religion.

Thankfully the three markers of the dissertation seemed to agree that I had made my argument, and passed it. I will stop formal study at this point but not the continuing study of all things Franciscan for that is surely an 'on-going' task for us all.

## ◆◆ Living Faith Week

*Joseph Emmanuel writes:*

**Christopher Martin, Desmond Alban and Joseph Emmanuel** were invited by the Rector of Witney, Fr Toby Wright, to participate in the week long 'Living Faith Mission', in May, and what a week it was! From dawn (at least 9.00am morning prayer) until dusk (if not night) we were involved in a dizzying whirl of visits around the Parish. The focus was on school visits so the majority of our time was spent in that context with teams of missionaries visiting all of the primary schools in Witney and at least two senior schools. In the primary schools we encouraged the children to think about Pentecost and invited them to join us for Messy Church on the Saturday (26 May) in St Mary's. For the older students we were less proscribed, taking part in a question and answer session during which we were asked some very complex and thought provoking questions including our understanding of the notion of truth and whether we thought the burqa should be banned in France!

We also had services in the evening including a well attended and moving healing service, coordinated by Desmond Alban, and an evening focusing on social justice at which three 'foreign' missionaries spoke about their own experiences in India, Sweden and South Africa. Team building was another feature of the week and on one memorable occasion this involved fire walking (over wood ashes heated to around seven hundred degrees...) and learning to chop wooden blocks with the bare hand. Needless to say this engendered a certain amount of interest in our young interlocutors and was a distraction from more weighty theological matters!

We all felt that the week was a tremendous success and a privilege to be involved in such an enterprise. It also bore testimony to the phenomenal enthusiasm for mission already present in the Parish of Witney and to the inspiring leadership of Fr Toby and his team.

## ◆◆ Korea

*Sue writes:*

In May I made my first visit to our Korean CSF sisters Frances and Jemma, staying at their home in Gumi, and with them, in Seoul, and at the SSF Friary at Gangchon, where cleaning and repairs were well underway, following the

## Two new Ministers Provincial for the First Order in the European Province



*Benedict has been a friar since June 1970. He has lived in many of the houses, having had prolonged stays in the East End of Glasgow and at Glasshampton, as well as nearly three years in Zimbabwe. He was ordained priest in 1992. Canning Town will be useful as a base as Minister Provincial and an opportunity for other ministries including being a street pastor.*



*Sue joined CSF in 1995 after working as a teacher in Sierra Leone in her 20s, and then in pastoral ministry for 16 years, and was ordained priest in 1994. After many years at Compton Durville, she is happy to be part of the Oratory of St. Alphege in Southwark, where she combines her role as Minister Provincial with spiritual direction, cathedral chaplaincy, and occasional speaking engagements.*





### CSF Korean Regional Chapter

**Bishop Onesimus, Frances, Jemma and Sue CSF, Sr Catherine SHC interpreting, and Lawrence SSF with his back to the camera.**

explosion there ten days earlier.

It was a privilege to be with the sisters and to share something of their community life. They currently occupy two small flats in adjacent blocks in downtown Gumi, but are in the process of building a convent in a nearby village, where they will be able to have guests and enable others to share in their life and worship more readily. Bishop Onesimus of Busan, who recently became Bishop Protector for CSF in Korea, is very appreciative of the sisters and is providing support in various ways, including commending a fund-raising appeal among Korean Anglicans for their building project. He attended their Regional Chapter held in Seoul during my visit, and afterwards commented on his diocesan website that it had been a very beautiful and encouraging meeting! The sisters are very involved in the life of the Anglican Church in Gumi, which celebrated its tenth anniversary while I was there, and also more widely. They are obviously held in high regard, and both exercise a significant pastoral ministry alongside their other work.

It is surely a joyful part of my task as Minister to visit the Korean sisters each year. We hope that by the time of my next visit Frances and Jemma will have moved to Il-seon-ri, and will temporarily have fitted everything essential into one new building there while the second is being constructed. These are exciting and challenging times for the sisters, and they very much value our support and prayers.

## ◆◆ Ecumenical dialogue in Assisi

**Damian** attended a conference in Assisi organised by Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network. *He writes:*

This initiative for an ecumenical and interfaith gathering in Assisi in April 2012

brought together 250 men and women from 55 countries, from the mainline Christian denominations and world faiths. The task was to think outside the box, seeking pathways towards effective dialogue. While the meeting included much diversity in culture and religious experience, the clear majority were Roman Catholic academics, some Anglicans certainly, but few Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Orthodox, and just token representation from other faith communities.

Assisi made an attractive venue and many admitted this was their very first visit or close encounter with its Saints. There was one clear, shared motive - to search for means to revive positive energy towards the unity of the Church and improve inter-faith relations. Fuelling these aims was a recognition that church-going Christians in the West were decreasing in numbers, while dramatically increasing in Asia, Africa and South America.

One of the popular members of this gathering was Peter Phan from Vietnam who reminded us of the introductory words commending ecumenism to the Second Vatican Council. This warned that our divisions oppose the will of God, bring scandal before the world and damage our effectiveness in mission.

As we studied recent history we noted the mega shifts towards justice, peace and human dignity brought through Martin Luther King in America and Nelson Mandela in South Africa. From Northern Ireland, Paul Arthur described how the Peace Agreement was achieved by both official and unofficial, informal meetings, the latter initially in secret, sharing free time together, telling family stories, placing no restrictions on the agenda. That approach to peace brought progress that was then fed back into the official talks. "Track 2 fed Track 1" to build up trust so as to provide the basis for peaceful coexistence. We heard, too, from a Jewish American who had renounced his 'right' to a settlement place in Israel today. He is working with Palestinians on principles based on the Kairos Report that brought hope to Soweto - principles that have since been applied to many a nation's conflicts since: "seeing the face of God in the other".

Post-modern thought is by definition fluid and not dogmatic. Progress will not be made by focusing on Creeds, but rather be picked up through paths of pilgrimage, openness, moving away from

suspicion towards appreciation. We were reminded of St. Francis who first heard God's call to rebuild San Damiano Church; it was only later he came to understand he was being called to rebuild and renew the whole vision of God for his people. Similarly we may need to revisit our responses to this call to ecumenism.

Lastly, when we met together in St Clare's Basilica to hear about "those who hold the incomparable treasure" (Clare's words to Agnes of Prague) the Conference settled into a profound corporate silence, as if we had recognised more deeply that God's purposes cannot be achieved without that close, inner encounter with his indwelling Spirit, enlightening all that had been said, proposed and purposed. It was a privilege to attend.

## ◆◆ Round up

**Vaughan** made his profession in First Vows at the Friary of the Divine Compassion, Plaistow, on 7 July. **Beverley** was ordained priest by the Bishop of Leicester, in Leicester Cathedral, on 30 June.

**Nicholas Alan** was installed as an honorary canon of Worcester Cathedral at Evensong on 18 May. **Giles** and **Raphael** marked the fiftieth anniversary of their ordinations to the priesthood on 16 June with a celebratory Eucharist at Hilfield friary.

**Giles** moved to Hilfield in May. In July, **Benedict** moved to the Canning Town friary and **Barnabas Francis** to Canterbury. Shortly before Francistide (4 October), **Joseph Emmanuel** will move to Canning Town, **Christopher Martin** to Leeds, **Cristian Michael** to Bentley, and **David, Micael Christoffer** and **Robert** to Glasshampton. Three men have been accepted as aspirants and will begin their postulancy at Alnmouth in September.

**Teresa** is now happily settled in a residential care home in Birmingham. It is the same care home as **Angela Helen** is in, making it easier for the sisters in Birmingham to keep in contact with them both.

**Jennifer Chan** left CSF when her time in first profession came to an end in Februar, 2012. She has since made her vow in the Consecrated SingleLife before Archbishop Roger Herft in Perth, Australia. She is being mentored by our brothers in the Province of the Divine Compassion and is continuing her ministries with the Cathedral in Kuching.

Also in other provinces, elections have resulted in new Ministers Provincial: **Christopher John** in the Province of the Divine Compassion, **Clifton Henry** in the Province of the Solomon Islands, and **Oswald Dumbari** in the Papua New Guinea Province. *J*



# Focus on Glasshampton

Next Monday our inflexible house routine will have to bend slightly in order to accommodate another institution's equally invariable programme - a local primary school is to make a pilgrimage to the nearest monastery (us) arriving at 10 a.m. and leaving an hour later. This represents a disruption of the Monday morning's cleaning activities in that a brother who would normally be occupied with the brothers' sanitary arrangements will instead be at the service of twenty children and two teachers in introducing them to a way of life instituted here in 1918 by Father William SDC.

They will thus be the most recent members of that gallant band of 'guests and visitors' who since that day 94 years ago have toiled up the track or across the field to sample Glasshampton's delights. Children have been in short supply - at the dedication of the monastery which was the ecclesiastical recognition of the foundation there were choirboys from the village, between them and the pilgrims next Monday one or two school groups - and that's all. Glasshampton is not really a place for children, and is the poorer for it; but their presence is not conducive to Glasshampton's greatest blessing - silence.

A silence into which, we believe, God speaks to the refugees who come here to listen from a life of hectic activity and a constant bombardment of noise. That is one ministry of the house.

In parallel, it serves as a place of prayer for a small group of professed members of SSF - at present mourning the death of one of their number, Nathanael - and for novices, usually in their second year of community life, the present two being Christopher Martin (Chris) and Joseph Emmanuel (Joe).

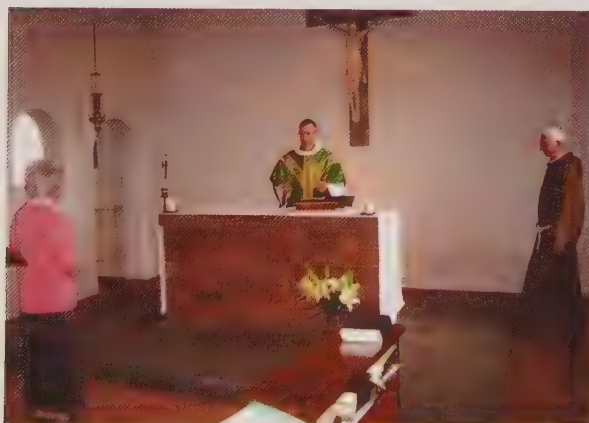
And what do we do? We cook, we clean rooms, clothes and bedclothes, floors and tables, dishes - we pray and sing and preach, we wake and sleep, we grow flowers and vegetables, we go shopping and count the money and spend it. And listen to peoples' stories and accompany them on their journeys, send them on their way refreshed with the blessing of God. *f*



*Anselm answers questions from young pilgrims, while Christopher Martin cooks lunch.*



*Joseph Emmanuel studying in the library.*



*Nicholas Alan, presiding at the Eucharist, invites the guests and brothers to gather round the altar.*



*Tea in the guest common room: Anselm, Amos and Nicholas Alan with visitors.*



*Home is ... where you hang your hat!*

## Hilfield Friary

### Hilfield Stigmata Festival 2012 15 September

12 noon Eucharist followed by an afternoon with the Hilfield Friary Community, ending with tea and Evening Prayer  
(Please bring a packed lunch)

★

For further information and for other weekend and day events, see  
[www.hilfieldfriary.org.uk](http://www.hilfieldfriary.org.uk)

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## Reviews

**Annie Heppenstall**  
*The Healer's Tree:*

*A Bible-based resource on ecology,  
peace and justice*

ISBN 9781 8495 2077 5

Wild Goose Publications, 2011, pp157,  
£11.50

This book came into my hands at the beginning of Advent and I was able to experience it, as it was designed to be used, as readings over 28 days. It is not, however, focused on any particular season of the year, natural or liturgical.

Each day has a title, the first, "Garden of Eden" and the last "Along the riverbank" ... from Genesis to Revelation. Between these are natural features: trees, cedar, tamarisk, and biblical symbols: the tree of life, and a series of saints, mostly from these islands, and their stories. Each suggests to the author an aspect of our faith and our relationship to the world. For instance, "The Green Man and the three hares: a common bond" starts with a passage from the Book of Tobit, 'many nations shall come to you from far away', and then Anne traces these age old symbols, found not just in our churches carved on bosses, but the green man to an Indian Jain temple and the hares to a Buddhist one in China. She points us to "creation... being a vibrant temple to the living God", and starts her following prayer poem, "Limitless God, give me confidence to look for you everywhere..."

On the title page for each day is a line drawing by the author, and at the end suggestions for further reflection, often pointing to Bible passages for reading and meditation. The way each day is laid out, helps us to stand back from our busy lives, to make space for considering from a distance the troubles of the world, the questions we have about our relationship to God and others, and how we might go forward relying on God's grace. Also it encourages us to look with fresh eyes at the world around us and at pictorial symbols we find in biblical passages. It could be a good book to have at hand both for those times of peace and stillness, and also as an antidote in those times of busyness when we find ourselves sucked in to the whirlpool of life.

**Caroline Ugbo TSSF**

**William R. Hugo OFM Cap.**

*Studying the Life of Saint Francis of  
Assisi. A Beginner's workbook, 2nd ed*

ISBN: 9781 5654 8397 2.

New York, New City Press, 2011,  
247pp. £14.95

This study guide to the sources for Francis of Assisi and aspects of his life was first published in 1996 by The Franciscan Press. This is a considerably revised edition and one tied into the use

of the series *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, published since the first edition appeared. The author aims to provide the tools and maps out a route for the users to discover for themselves the person of Francis. Hugo takes great care to set out his own biases - which is much to be commended. However in comparing the two editions one notes that he has silently omitted the statement that he does not believe in miracles (something he says he took care to inform his students within the first few days of any course he ran, according to the first edition). He looks at the sources through the lens of history.

This is, then, a work taking a robustly critical approach to the sources. Bill Short OFM, in commending the volume, says that it "does for Franciscan sources what a good commentary does in helping us understand Biblical texts". For each of the sources he gives a general introduction and then information about date and authorship, origin and purpose, organization, sources and other characteristics, an evaluation of the source and suggested reading. For each of the selected topics relating to Francis he lists the sources, gives starter questions and suggestions and for many topics provides further reading. It is Hugo's contention that our theology and spirituality are only as good as the history on which they rest - an approach with which I heartily concur.

This guide will seem too critical for some, but for many more it will provide a sound basis for studying the life of Francis. It will help us to see more clearly who Francis is, cleared of some of the sentimentality that can so easily distort pictures of him. It will prove valuable to those involved in formation in the Franciscan Orders and indeed any wanting to examine the sources for themselves. Hugo takes great care not to present a particular reading of the sources - he leaves us to make up our own minds having read the material and pondered it for ourselves. I commend it warmly - the first edition has been useful to me since I bought it in 2001.

**Gordon Plumb TSSF**

**Thomas R Yoder Neufeld**

*Jesus and the subversion of violence -  
Wrestling with the New Testament  
evidence.*

ISBN: 9780 2810 6068 9

SPCK, 2011, 176pp, £14.99

In the letter to the Ephesians there is the beautiful passage, almost a hymn, to the reconciling, peace-making nature of God when those who are far off are brought near and erstwhile enemies are reconciled in to one family. But you can't avoid the fact that these commendable goals are achieved by shattering walls, blood (short-hand for the crucifixion) and finally that Jesus will kill the enmity. Do we have violence at the heart of the

gospel, is the kingdom only achieved through our use of morally 'good' violence? This is important stuff, there is a history of Christian violence against those who disagree with us, down to our own day and the Bush/Blair wars. This book is by a New Testament scholar who is also a pastor of the Mennonite Church, a church committed to non-violence. Perhaps with a sense of irony it subtitles itself as wrestling with the New Testament evidence but it makes an honest and credible case for how Jesus and the New Testament writers intend to subvert violence by exposing its rebellion against God. After reading this book you can get excited by the possibilities of using scripture to focus our faith on peace and not simply look embarrassed by all the blood and violence in it. It is not a full investigation of the Bible, more a probe of a few significant passages, but for those who would want to go deeper it is a good introduction to many other authors through its extensive footnotes and bibliography.

**Kentigern John SSF**

**Marcus J. Borg**

*Speaking Christian*

*Recovering the Lost Meaning of  
Christian Words*

ISBN 978-0-281-06508-0

SPCK, 2011, 256pp, £9.99

This is an important book! Marcus Borg is well known as a popularising theologian and bible scholar, and this book will delight anyone who has read his previous books, *Meeting Jesus in Mark* and *Jesus*. In *Speaking Christian* he tries to explain Christian vocabulary and terminology and for that reason is timely. How are we to understand terms like God, incarnation, sin, forgiveness, salvation and the dozens of words we Christians use daily, but are like a foreign language to the rest of the world? Worse, many of the terms in common use in the Church and churches did have different connotations to people in biblical and early Christian times. He sheds new, or rather original, light on just about all theological and biblical terms, and shows what they originally meant to

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convey and how they are (ab)used now. He explains how our Christian terminology is most often understood in a heaven-or-hell framework and a result of a literalization of the Bible.

Many of Borg's explanations will give the reader a sense of liberation. The book is not sensational, as *Honest to God* and *Original Blessing* were in their day, books that had impact at the time, but are pretty well forgotten now. Those for whom liberal is a "dirty" word will condemn it with a knee-jerk reaction, to the rest of us it will be liberating. When he gives a heading demoting sin it won't be offending just fundamentalists.

In our Christian imagery and lexicon we (or at least most of us) still use pictures and terms from the concept of the three-decker universe: in the Creed we state that Jesus came down from heaven and ascended into heaven. But how else are we going to affirm what we believe? Borg, like most of us, does not want to rewrite the Creeds, but suggests they can be made to sound less harsh if they are sung. This is true, after all, words are only one component in a hymn. He also suggests alternating the creed in traditional wording with a more modern statement from time to time.

But that does not solve or even alter the problem. Instead of all that, I would say with Leslie Holden:

*When we say the Creed, we do not do it in the spirit of people who are asked their opinion, consider the matter, and then agree if they can. We do it in the spirit of people committed to God as Christians and are content to use these old words of the Church to say so in public. We are not asked to agree with every word or to feel that we should express our faith exactly like this, we are asked to express our Christian commitment, using these shared words to make our act of allegiance. For the God we seek and serve is greater than any words we could put together.*

However, this tough book ought to be read and reread by all who have a task of interpreting Scripture, and indeed by everyone who wants to think about the meaning of Christian concepts and words.

**Thomas Anthony SSF**

**Bruce W Longenecker**  
***Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty and the Greco-Roman World***  
ISBN: 9780 8028 6373 7  
**Eerdmans, 2010, 391pp, £16.99**

Franciscans will be attracted by the title and this solid, scholarly work which delves into St Paul's concern for the poor in those areas where he was engaged in missionary work. But to what extent was Paul (and therefore the early Gentile churches) conscious of poverty in their witness to the Gospel of Jesus? The biblical evidence appears short; the more direct references in Galatians and Corinthians, particularly the collection for

the Jerusalem widows, are closely examined. Useful indices for biblical and other ancient source references make it possible to dip here and there amongst well organised and contained chapters.

Compared with his pre-apostolic days, Paul had placed himself among the poor of his time. "I know what it is to have little and to have plenty" (Phil 4.11). It appears that he did not lean on rich friends but worked humbly for his personal maintenance. As a Roman citizen his peers would have despised manual labour.

The recognition of Paul as not so much giving to the poor but being included with the poor leads the author to examine in detail the levels of poverty that existed around him. Conscious of the cost of caring for the church, did Paul attempt to challenge the prevailing attitudes, dismissing the plight of the poor, as he journeyed through Asia Minor? Did Paul's Gospel carry a call to relieve poverty, as the Jewish tradition and practice witnessed to before the rise of Christianity? Paul lived and worked outside the influence of Judaism, indeed in an anti-Jewish context.

While some of Longenecker's statistical analysis will be pertinent to the scholar, his arguments for identifying the poor in the urban Greco-Roman world of Paul's time, and the categories of their plight, make interesting reading.

This important debate leads the author finally to discuss how Paul's last visit to Jerusalem, the trial and the delivering of the collection (or not) brought with it grounds for controversy over his reputation which may have led to his death. However this book dispels all doubts about St Paul's concern for the poor of his time.

**Damian SSF**

**David Runcorn**  
***Fear and Trust:***  
***God-centred Leadership***  
ISBN 9780 2810 6389 5  
**Ebook ISBN 9780 2810 6673 5**  
**SPCK, 2011, £9.99**

David Runcorn is now a "free range priest" - having worked as a parish priest and in theological training and development. His experience has aroused in him serious misgivings about the current ecclesiastical preoccupation with the models of personnel selection and training to be found in the world of business, and this concern finds a clear voice in his latest book.

With him we revisit the narratives of 1 and 2 Samuel in the Old Testament, and trace the leadership theme through the stories of the last of the Judges (Samuel) and the first of the kings (Saul, Jonathan, David) with the light of sanity and compassion provided by women (Hannah, Michal, Bathsheba, Rizpah, the witch of Endor). Jonathan was the king in waiting whom Yahweh rejected in favour

of David.

Many readers will be led to revise their perceptions of these archetypal leadership figures, and will find in their stories themes familiar to us with our leadership concerns and anxieties - celebrity status, early promise soon fading, the effects of the exercise of power on mental health, the price of over exposure to the public gaze, the heavy cost to the leader's family

The conclusion? Renewal comes about not under the leadership of those driven by anxiety about preservation of the institution, but of those free from such anxiety, free to dream a different world.

"We are called to the honest, disciplined attentiveness that has shaped this extraordinary work of ancient storytelling. Our hope lies here - and nowhere else".

**Anselm SSF**

**Martin L. Smith**  
***Love Set Free: Meditations on the Passion According to Saint John***  
ISBN 9781 8482 5100 7  
**Canterbury Press, Norwich, 2011,**  
**60 pp, £7.99**

The author was a member of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist (Cowley Fathers) for 26 years. This led him to develop his own prayer life by drawing from the riches of the Fourth Gospel. When invited to preach on Good Friday in a church in Boston, U.S.A., he shared his own spirituality by taking as his theme St. John's account of the Passion, from which he wove a series of meditations. This book gives us the text of his addresses.

Naturally this theme has been explored by countless preachers and writers over the years, but here we have some fresh insights and emphases, which the reader will need to take time to assimilate. For example, he asserts that the crucifixion of Jesus was not only intended to destroy Jesus; it was designed to smash a movement, and yet it had the opposite effect because it drew people into the community of love.

It is sometimes said that the four Gospels are primarily accounts of the Passion, and that the preceding material is introductory. This may be an exaggerated statement. However, in this book there are many cross- references to events and sayings which are recorded earlier in John's Gospel.

The final meditation on the silence of the tomb is very moving. The author notes that Jesus appears out of silence, and the Baptist greets him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He leaves the world, having accomplished his mission. But there is no theory of atonement; instead the Evangelist bears witness to the experience of sin forgiven.

This book will repay quiet and prayerful study. It is pre-eminently suitable for Lent reading and meditation.

**Martin SSF**



# A homily for Br Nathanael's Funeral

*Samuel SSF*

"No eulogy", wrote Br Nathanael sometime ago when preparing instructions for his funeral. "No eulogy" underlined three times! Down to earth, no fuss, no trimmings - very Nat! So this is not a "eulogy"; this is a "homily" - on the scriptures that we've just heard. But even a "homily-that-is-not-a-eulogy" will allow us to acknowledge that we've come from far and wide today to remember and give thanks for our brother Nathanael.

Some, of course, will remember him by his baptismal name, Kenneth. We've come from Bolton, from our Franciscan friaries around the country, and especially from the Principality of Wales for which Nat had so great an affection and where he ministered for more than thirty years. We remember him as the loving brother of his sister Joyce, as the uncle of his nieces and nephew, and as the widower of his wife, Sally, to whom he was married for three years before joining the Society of St Francis. We remember him as a family friend, as a Franciscan brother for more than fifty years, as a priest, a pastor, a teacher, a spiritual guide, a gardener and handy-man, and above all as a faithful Christian man.

"I thought I said 'No eulogy'", I can hear Nathanael saying! He's right, of course, a funeral isn't the place for heaping praise on the one who has died as though on account of his merits we are commending him to God. Our merits, as Nat would want to remind us, are God's mercies, and we enter and live in God's kingdom by faith in the grace of God alone; and the praise, likewise, belongs to God. So let's look at the scriptures that Nathanael has chosen for his funeral. The first reading, from the Old Testament, tells of a young man on the run - Jacob, fleeing from the anger of his brother Esau. Coming to a certain place, and lying down for the night, he has a dream of a ladder between heaven and earth and of the angels of God descending and ascending: 'The Lord is in this place', cries Jacob, 'this is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.'

'Young men shall dream dreams', says the prophet Joel, 'and the old shall see visions'. The world has always needed - and today more than ever needs - a dream, a vision, which opens our hearts, which stretches our imaginations, and which takes us beyond ourselves. Such a dream or vision lies at the heart of all Christian vocation - evoking our wonder, our obedience, and our service. It's what gives our vocation its purpose and direction; it's what sustains it day by day. Without the vision of God daily before us our vocation easily turns into a career path in which our energy and attention are focussed on our own advancement, our

own achievement and our own success. Praise God that Nathanael has been given this vision of God's glory on which he has focused his life, and by which he has been sustained over the past eighty-two years.

*Brother Nathanael SSF  
died on 31 May, 2012,  
and his funeral Mass was  
held in a church near  
Glasshampton Monastery.  
He was aged eighty-two  
years and  
in the forty-eighth year of  
his profession in vows.*

Then in the epistle reading St Paul speaks of the treasure of the Gospel, the vision of the glory of God, being held in clay vessels, in earthenware pots. Paul is very well aware of his own fragility and vulnerability - the Corinthians, to whom he is writing, have never let him forget it. All of us, Nathanael no exception, are earthy creatures, people with cracks, but the Good News is that those cracks, fault lines and fragile places can be, and often are, God's opportunity - the opportunity for grace, gift, miracle to be at work in our lives and in our world. Neither the world nor the Church needs super-heroes - people who are always right, successful and powerful; celebrities who wow the crowds. Rather, what seems to be required are those who have the gift of humility; who know their own origin and rootedness in the earth and who therefore can allow the transforming life of God in Jesus Christ to be at work in them. As St Paul says: 'grace at work in us (in Nathanael) increases thanksgiving to the glory of God'.

And lastly, we come to the Gospel reading, and we can see why Nat chose it because it's about another Nathanael, one of the Twelve, in fact one of the very first whom Jesus called to be a disciple. At first he's sceptical: 'Can anything good

come out of Nazareth?', he says to Philip - I can hear Nat saying that in his Lancashire accent! But that Nathanael came and saw and believed: 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel.' And what Jesus replies to him is significant - for him and for us - 'You will see greater things than this' (in effect, you ain't seen nothing yet). As with Jacob, heaven is going to be opened and 'you will see the glory of God descending and ascending on the Son of Man.' That's Jesus' promise to Nathanael and it remains Jesus' promise to us. We may not see God's glory in all its fullness - that would be too much for us to bear at present - but what we've seen in the face of Jesus Christ gives us the encouragement to hope for more, to hope for nothing less than to share and to live in the glory of God, the same glory revealed to us in Jesus, crucified and risen.

Our Brother Nathanael lived in that hope, and I believe that it probably increased in him during the final months of his life. When I last saw him a few weeks ago he told me about the doctor giving him the news of his diagnosis. "We believe that you've got lung cancer", said the doctor. "Thank you, doctor" said Nathanael. "Do you want to ask any questions about it?" said the doctor. "No thank you", said Nathanael. "Do you have any concerns about it?" asked the doctor. "Doctor", replied Nat, "I've been a Franciscan brother for the past fifty years, and if I'm not ready now to welcome Sister Death things have come to a pretty pass." A very "Nathanael way" of going about it! Well, Sister Death has now taken him from us and, praise God, Nat will see heaven opened and will now know the vision of God fully revealed in all its glory.



*Nathanael SSF*